# Will the Film Stars Have to have Poorhouse Too?

## *One Who Earned Fortunes Now Bankrupt—Another Who Is Famous Was Sued by Her Plumber ---and a "Hero" Who Reigned As a King Sold His Furniture--- Mystery of Their Vanishing Millions*

**Will their kind ever need one? An almshouse near New York, with Francis X. Bushman and Beverly Baine, who have been playing tennis, stopping for a moment to ponder upon it.**

THE unfortunate situation of Miss Rose Coghlan, who has been one of the best known figures on the American stage, and who has come to a period of suffering for the need of money, has caused a great many observers of the trend of "human events" to wonder what sort of circumstance it is that leads stars of the theatrical world to the edge of the poorhouse lawn. Most especially is it wondered whether or not the young ladies and gentlemen of the film world who are now enjoying such fabulous salaries and all the magnificence of luxuries that hark back to the days of Babylon will eventually have to have a sort of "film star poorhouse" of their own.

On Staten Island, in New York's harbor, there is a very beautiful little estate, with wide, sweeping lawns, charmingly landscaped gardens, trees and flower bushes, which, despite its attractive exterior, is, after all, just a theatrical poorhouse. It is a home for stage folk who have come to the end of their active careers and who find themselves penniless. It is a home conducted by the theatrical world itself. And there are none who can say that the players who move in the footlight world are not generous to their own and sympathetic to those who are in distress.

On the "guest register" at the stage people's home are many names which not so many years ago were names to conjure with. Some were blazoned on billboards across the country. Some achieved the distinction of being entertained and feted by royalty in Great Britain and on the continent.

Of course the majority of these old people in their day earned those enormous salaries which always have been one of the spectacular embellishments of the theatrical world. Miss Coghlan, for example—who has not, however, found it necessary to go to Staten Island—was known to be one of the highest salaried actresses of the last generation. There are many reasons why she is almost penniless to-day. They are the reasons that have intimately to do with the personal circumstances which have governed her career. They make a drama, of course. In every spectacular life there is a drama, with its changing climaxes and its thrilling sequences. Only Miss Coghlan herself could reveal the secret of her present distress.

But it is interesting to speculate upon the mystery of the future as it will affect these newer lights of the theatrical world, which may be spoken of generally as "our film stars." There still is something new, something mysterious and unknown, about the foremost players in the cinema. We are constantly wondering at them, our attention is constantly attracted to them. And there are most clearly drawn signs that these young ladies and gentlemen of the film world are most profligate with the weekly fortunes which filter into their hands as the result of their popularity with the public.

The time for a poorhouse solely for cinema stars has not yet arrived. There is no old generation of these. The films are still so new that their first celebrities still are well within their working days. In another ten years, though, some of those whose names have been flashed around the world in the electric lights that glitter so brightly before the film theaters will have reached the age when they will no longer be received by the "casting directors." Some of them even now are playing minor parts—filling in with groups, or impersonating gentle old ladies and eccentric elderly men. In their youth they were stars, and their field was romance. Now they have become "fathers and mothers" in their characterizations, and the scope of their abilities is that of parental sentiment only. Fathers and mothers on the screen draw but little pay. The screen does not associate romance with age. And it is romance only that commands huge salaries.

**Miss Murray, who has Italian gardens in her apartment and who was sued by her plumber. On the right is Mae Busch, who has received generous salaries, but who has just gone into bankruptcy.**

**A scene in the Actors' Home at Staten Island. The old man is D. W. Griffith, who was one of the well known tragedians of other days. All shown in the pictures were famous in their time.**

It was but a few years ago, for example, that the most prominent masculine star of the "movies" was the handsome, debonair and dashing Maurice Costello. Who is there who attended the cinema theaters when the price of admission was seldom higher than fifteen cents who does not remember this hero of a thousand thrilling photoplays? The popularity of a Fairbanks, a Reid or even a Chaplin of to-day is as nothing compared to the fame of Maurice Costello when, as the old song would say, "he was in his prime."

The earnings of this star, when he was a star, are still traditional. It was said of him that no theatrical celebrity ever had earned such a salary. Each year when his contracts expired film makers vied with each other in their inducements to him to join their forces. The prosperity of many of the firmly established producing companies to-day was founded upon their profits from the making of those early Costello film dramas.

Just the other day a rather nondescript, somewhat pathetic little figure, still spruce and debonair, however, was noticed leaning over the last seats in a rather small film theater, interestedly watching the silent play of the drama on the screen. The picture being shown was one of those that had been dug out of the past—a sentimental and romantic episode of the West in which Maurice Costello had been the star. And the somewhat forlorn looking figure leaning over the seats was that of Costello himself.

Costello still is an active drawing card in the theatrical world. The incident of the little theater is mentioned only that it may emphasize the contrast. Costello returned to vaudeville, whence he came to adorn the film world. His ability to do this is fortunate. Few others have the same opportunity.

Another star of Costello's day was the famous John Bunny, who was far more popular as a comedian than any who reign to-day. Bunny was rich as well as beloved. Throughout the country theaters were named for him. A beautiful country estate was his relaxation. During the earlier periods of his fame he "put away" a small farm in the West, which he declared was to be his retreat when old age should come. When Bunny signed new contracts with film producers the amount of his salary was an item of important news among those who were interested in the various phases of the motion picture industry of that day. There seemed to be no limit to his progress toward a weekly pay envelope of enormous proportions.

Suddenly this gentle natured comedian died. There was a will and an estate. But they had to do only with a few dollars. He left scarcely enough to guard his widow from serious inconveniences. No charge of profligacy could have been brought against him. He did not live as do many of the picture stars of to-day. He was associated with no revels, no spectacular tours about the world, no large fleet of multicolored automobiles. Nor any of the other rather pathetic extravagances to which so many film stars commit themselves.

Another similar instance was that of the unfortunate Olive Thomas, whose tragic death in Paris still is somewhat of a mystery, with its suggestions of suicide. Miss Thomas, who was one of the foremost stars of her time, and whose name outside the theatre drew hundreds of thousands every day to see her "latest production," was a familiar figure in New York's Fifth and Park avenues, where almost every day she was to be seen dashing about in expensive automobiles of foreign make with liveried chauffeurs and footmen. Her furs and jewels were one of the sensations of the "Rialto." Periodically she flitted away to Europe with a retinue of admirers in her train, and abroad her passage was something of the procession of an Empress. When she died she left only her automobiles, her furs and her jewels. And even these were mortgaged and had to be sold at auction.

Just the other day it was noted in the news that Miss Mae Busch, who, while not one of the foremost stars, has enjoyed most generous salaries for some time, and whose name has been associated with some of the most successful of the later film masterpieces, had been compelled to resort to bankruptcy proceedings. Her estate, as she listed it, amounted virtually to nothing. Her creditors were modistes and tailors and she had not been able to pay them. Undoubtedly Miss Busch earned during the last few years of her prominence much more than $150,000.

One of the most spectacular of the romantic stars of the film world now prominently before the public is the vivacious Mae Murray. Miss Murray's career, like herself, has been most spectacular. It frequently has been said that, despite the claims of many other stars, Miss Murray's income has consistently been larger than the majority of them. It might well be taken for granted that her weekly pay envelope includes a figure close to $3,500. And it might further be accepted as a certainty that there are contracts which guarantee that this pay envelope will materialize each week for at least a year or two. Miss Murray has no family responsibilities, she has often told her friends. And in addition, there is a most successful husband whose wages also may be estimated at almost the same figure as those of his wife.

Just a short time ago Miss Murray attracted attention by appearing in court to defend a suit brought against her by a plumber, who declared that he had been unable to collect from her the two or three hundred dollars he had charged for installing some of the luxuries of Miss Murray's bath.

It was then disclosed that Miss Murray is the happy mistress of an apartment which includes such items as Roman gardens, Italian suites and indoor landscapes—all mere features of an apartment which nestles away in one of New York's apartment houses.

Miss Murray contended, of course, in her defense to the plumber's suit that it was not that she could not pay, but that she would not. And so that must be right. Miss Murray may be accepted, however, as the example of a class. And will they some day have to have a poorhouse of their own?

Francis X. Bushman still is a tradition in the film world. Especially noted as being "the handsomest man," he also was a most convincing interpreter of romantic cinema roles. He was, in fact, for many years the one supreme matinee idol of the film fans. His versatility seemed to know no limitations. From the chaparral of the Wyoming cowboy riding fast and furious across the plains to the rescue of the cowpuncher's fair daughter he passed with delightful ease into the habiliments of *Romeo* and stood gracefully below the balcony on which was borne his entrancing *Juliet*. And those who thrilled at his cowboy brushed away tears at his tragic finish as *Romeo*. It made no difference what the subject. It was Francis X. Bushman the great throngs clamored to see. And these same throngs never remembered, or if they did they did not care, that their hero had been not so long before a promising grocer's clerk.

The whilom grocer's boy moved into one of the most magnificent estates in the aristocratic suburbs of Baltimore. Out beyond the lawn was a roomy stable, where high bred horses were quartered. Mr. Bushman had long looked forward to the time when he might have a "racing string" of his own. Close by was the spacious stone garage in which Mr. Bushman's town car, his touring car, his roadster and his racer were kept, always spick and span and ready to answer whatever might be their master's whim of the moment. It was said by some one then that there were more servants on the Bushman estate than there had been clerks in all the grocery stores in the Bushman native town.

Not so long ago an auctioneer disposed to haggling, bartering buyers the furniture, rugs, paintings and other effects of Mr. Bushman's home. Marvelous vases, which had been imported for him from France and which had cost thousands of dollars each, were sold for the song that is sung by a five dollar bill. Almost marvelous rugs from Persian looms, brought to this country for Mr. Bushman by agents sent abroad, were sold for the smallest fraction of their original cost.

Just why this sale was held, why Mr. Bushman found it necessary or advisable to sell at such great loss the furnishings which had made his home so lavishly elaborate, is not disclosed. He still is most active in the theater and still remains a star. Perhaps he wished merely to outfit his home anew—but this hardly seems possible.

Quite recently it was disclosed that even the foremost star of to-day has what his admirers think a most meager bank account. This is Charles Chaplin, who recently admitted to an interviewer that the most of his estate was represented by his bank balance, and that after all these years of his prominence and success this balance at that time reached only $350,000. "So you see," said Mr. Chaplin, "I have good reason to worry about my old age. And that explains why I am not such a spectacular spendthrift as many think I should be."

And if "Charlie" Chaplin is worrying about his old age, certainly it is permissible to wonder how spacious a poorhouse it will require for the prosperous film stars of to-day when their dreaded old age comes along.